## BEFORE THE STATE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORITY STATE OF NEVADA

In Re:

Nevada Connections Academy Notice of Closure or Possible Board Reconstitution

## **DECLARATION OF VERONICA BERRY**

- I, Veronica Berry, hereby declare under penalty of perjury as follows:
- I am the parent of an 11<sup>th</sup> grade student at Nevada Connections Academy
  ("NCA"). I make this declaration in support of NCA relative to closure proceedings before the
  State Public Charter School Authority held on May 25, 26, and 27, 2017, and continued to an
  unspecified date in 2017.
- 2. The matters set forth in this declaration are based on my own personal knowledge. If called upon to testify, I am competent to testify to the matters set forth herein.
- 3. My son was diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome when he was in the 3rd grade. Elementary school went pretty smoothly, although each year became harder for him to be accepted by his peers because he was "different" and as the others progressed, he did not. There was some bullying and teasing, and it increased through the years. Because his diagnosis is Asperger's, he struggles with certain social skills. The teachers and counselors told me that it was very important to keep Jesse in school because he needed to be around other children to develop his social skills. So, despite the fact that I wanted to take him out of school because of the bullying and teasing, I went against my better judgement and kept him in school because the teachers and counselors told me that was best for him.

- 4. Junior High was an entirely different story. I drove him to school, he ran in as the bell rang because he didn't want to give anyone any extra time to pick on him, and I picked him up after school for the same reason. It was breaking my heart more and more every day, but I had to do what they told me was the right thing for him. I felt like I was sending him to the wolves every day. The bullying started within a month of the start of the school year.
- 5. In the locker room before PE class is where the worst of it was, boys throwing water bottles and other things at him. I asked the PE teacher if he saw any of this, because at the beginning of the year he assured me he watched the boys through his window. The teacher claimed that he did not see anything. Their solution to this was to move Jesse to a row of lockers by himself, so he was away from everyone else, separating him even more from the group that already treated him as an outcast. He missed several days of school after this incident because he was scared. But I sent him back to this school because I was told he "needed" to be around other children for his socialization.
- 6. The harassing continued, and I went back and forth with the Dean and Principal for months. My son was then cornered in the locker room by a boy who told him he was going to "Slit his throat and feed his head to his dog." He came out of school completely hysterical. I called the Dean the next morning and the Superintendent, who told me that I had to schedule a meeting with the Principal, so I did. I also called the Clark County School District Police and had an officer meet me at the school for the meeting. The Principal did not seem to take the incident seriously, so I filed a police report. I was told the boy would be removed from the class, but he was not. I called the Dean, who had Jesse spend the next few days sitting in her office or the library during PE class, once again causing him to be treated as an outcast. When the semester was over, Jesse moved to health class, and that same boy was in his health class too. My concern increased at this apparent disregard for his safety.

- 7. There were many, many more incidents, all similarly mishandled. So I decided to go against the teacher and counselor advice and pull my son from his zoned public school because his life depended on it. Suicide was in his thoughts as the only way out. I enrolled him with Nevada Connections Academy for his 7th grade year. He is now in 11th grade, and his life from day one has been nothing but positive. He is excelling in school, he has a social life, he isn't afraid on a daily basis, like he was at his zoned school, and he found a best friend, something he never had before.
- 8. Nevada Connections Academy staff is amazing. My son is not afraid to go to school anymore. The effects from what happened to him at his zoned school are still with him, he has panic attacks every time we drive past that school, and he still talks about it and gets very anxious. I have to keep reminding him that we have Nevada Connections Academy now, so that will NEVER happen again. Pulling out of the zoned public school system and enrolling him in Nevada Connections Academy was the best thing I have ever done for him. He will graduate next year, and that will be a great accomplishment for him, something that wouldn't have been possible without Nevada Connections Academy. For him, there is no other option.

I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of Nevada that the foregoing is true and corrected and was executed this Haday of June, 2017, in LAS Vegas, Nevada.

JIAOMOO BLUYS VERONICA BERRY